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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0315
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2131
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SUBJECT: TIMELINE TO A NEW GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 6.

12. (C) SUMMARY: The new government may be sworn in as early as next week, although the timing is still not certain. The Prime Minister must first be elected by the Parliament and endorsed by the King; this should happen by early next week, although Royal timelines are not always certain. The PM then chooses the ministers (currently the subject of much debate within the six-party coalition and speculation within the media) and seeks an audience with the King for the swearing-in ceremony required before the new cabinet takes office. Once these formalities are concluded, we should send a congratulatory message to the new PM and lift section 508 sanctions as soon as possible. We encourage the Department to make a public statement when sanctions are lifted; we will submit a proposed draft. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) The Parliament held its ceremonial opening on Monday January 21 as expected, and elected the House Speaker and his two deputies on Tuesday, January 22. Controversial Peoples Power Party (PPP) official Yongyuth Tiypairat was elected Speaker, despite the threat of disqualification hanging over him from the continuing Election Commission investigation into allegations he was involved in election fraud. Two lesser-known PPP officials were chosen as his deputies. These officials should receive their royal endorsement today (January 24); provided they do, the new House Speaker should convene the next meeting of the Parliament on Monday, January 28. The Parliament will then likely vote on the Prime Minister the same day. Despite continued speculation about this position going to a less divisive figure, PPP officials insist that their party leader, Samak Sunthoravej, will be chosen.

14. (SBU) The name of the new prime minister will then be forwarded to the palace for approval. MFA officials told visiting DAS Marciel on January 23 that the approval should be forthcoming within a few days. (We note, however, that the Palace can move at its own pace.) The rest of the Cabinet seats must then be awarded. Based on the reports leaking out, the coalition partners have not reached agreement yet, with former PM Thaksin playing a leading role in determining who gets the nod. There are 35 minister and deputy minister portfolios to be divided among the 6 parties; according to

press reports, parties will get one seat for approximately every nine MPs. (Chart Thai leader Banharn, with the third-largest party and 34 seats, has complained publicly that this is not enough.) It seems likely, however, that the parties will reach agreement fairly soon, with many predicting the ministers will be locked in next week.

¶5. (SBUU) The parliament does not vote on the Cabinet line-up. Once the Prime Minister chooses the ministers, they must take an oath before the King. Normally, this audience is scheduled very quickly once the ministers have been chosen, but it is up to the Palace to set the time. The new government takes office only after it has been sworn in (this also applies, as we understand it, to the PM as well, even though his name would already have been approved by the Palace.) Presuming everything moves about as quickly as possible, this could happen as early as the middle or end of next week, although it might take a little longer.

¶6. (C) ACTION requests: The new government is not official until it is sworn in; our congratulatory message to the new PM should be sent after this ceremony takes place. The swearing in ceremony should also trigger the lifting of Section 508 sanctions as soon as possible. We would encourage the Department to make a public statement, noting the successful return to democratically-elected government and the lifting of our sanctions in recognition of this important step. We will forward a suggested statement shortly.

JOHN